

ABSTRACT

An unspecified-time airline ticket representing a purchased seat on a flight to be selected later, by the airlines, for a traveler-specified itinerary (e.g., NY to LA on March 3rd) is disclosed. Various methods and systems for matching an unspecified-time ticket with a flight are also disclosed. An exemplary method includes: (1) making available an unspecified-time ticket; (2) examining a plurality of flights which would fulfill the terms of the unspecified-time ticket to determine which flight to select; and (3) providing notification of the selected flight prior to departure. The disclosed embodiments provide travelers with reduced airfare in return for flight-time flexibility and, in turn, permits airlines to fill seats that would have otherwise gone unbooked. Because of the flexibilities required of the unspecified-time traveler, unspecified-time tickets are likely to attract leisure travelers unwilling to purchase tickets at the available published fares and, at the same time, are likely to "fence out" business travelers unwilling to risk losing a full day at either end of their trip. Moreover, the flexibilities required of the unspecified-time traveler need not be limited to a departure time; the flexibilities may also include the airline, the departing airport, the destination airport, or any other restriction that increases the flexibility afforded the airline in placing the traveler aboard a flight. The disclosed embodiments thus permit airlines to fill otherwise empty seats in a manner that stimulates latent and unfulfilled leisure travel demand while leaving their underlying fare structures intact.

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